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ABSTRACT

This packet describes 10 promising practices identified in small and rural elementary schools in New Hampshire, New York, and Vermont. Descriptions of the following innovations are presented: (1) community volunteers with diverse talents and experience became enrichment "teachers" during school time for students in intermediate grades, for which local businesses contributed money and materials, and school staff provided backup; (2) educators established a bridge between school and community through an unusual newsletter giving equal space and emphasis to each; (3) foreign language classes for grades 5 and 6 used the Total Physical Response approach, which patterns second language instruction on first language acquisition; (4) a fifth grade teacher successfully instituted individualized mathematics instruction in her self-contained classroom; (5) a rural school district completed self-assessments of seven educational aspects, developed action plans based on assessed needs, and set up district-wide task forces to address various improvement goals; (6) the Explore/Enrichment Program provided individual enrichment activities to students with special interests and talents while avoiding labeling and IQ screening; (7) primary teachers modified Mastery Learning techniques for use in their own outcomes-based instruction, and noted several objective indicators of student improvement; (8) a poor rural school district cooperated with a local youth and family agency to provide guidance and counseling in elementary schools; (9) primary students improved language skills by working on language activities in cross-age ability groups; and (10) "clusters" of 50 children, 2 regular classroom teachers, and a special education teacher replaced the typical classroom organization and overcame many negative aspects of pull-out remedial programs. Each description includes a contact person and suggestions for educators considering such a program. (SV)

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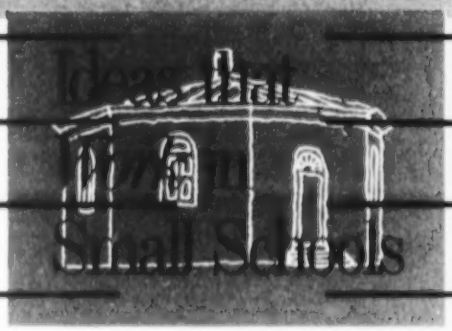

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Alton (NH) Enriches All 4-5-6 Grade Students

What do a NASA aerospace engineer, a weaver, a retired CIA officer and a Boy Scout executive have in common? Well, yes, they all do live in Alton, New Hampshire, a little town at the southern tip of Lake Winnipesaukee, which is fortunate for the young people there.

Beyond that common denominator, however, is the fact that these four, plus about 35 other volunteers, have all been drawn in as enrichment "teachers" to work with the kids in Grades 4-5-6. About half the group are retirees, some are staff members, others just citizens interested in helping.

When you consider the size of the Alton school (480 students, K-12) this seems a very large group of active volunteers. After meeting the whirlwind catalyst, Mary Batchelder, you would better understand why the program is so successful. She began work at Alton years ago as a volunteer librarian, later was hired part-time as a Title I tutor, then started a half-time creative writing program, and for the last four years has been full-time Gifted and Talented/Enrichment Coordinator. This British World War II war bride has actively recruited anyone with talent for the project - and are they enthusiastic!

How do you get all students involved in enrichment? Easy - you schedule part of it during the school day. Mini-courses for Grades 5-6 meet for 8-10 weeks the last period on Tuesday afternoons, with special courses for 4th Graders on Thursday.

Topics for 1986 include weaving; samplers; puppets; drama workshop; Olympics of the Mind; the solar system and Halley's Comet; furniture refinishing; outdoor survival; aviation, space and rocketry; exploring our town; and many others.

Students are absolutely convinced this is a good program; they are eager to share the benefits with visitors. For example, a recent Exploring our Town course discovered a horse is buried in the early settlers' cemetery. Old Tom was the beloved companion of Civil War hero Major George Savage, who specified in his will Tom's burial beside him. Local leaders finally compromised and buried Old Tom just across the stone wall from his master, outside the cemetery itself. A later expansion brought that area into the cemetery, so the will was thus eventually fulfilled.

Visiting all these classes gives one the feeling that here is a community and school which understands what good education is all about. Parents support the program in many ways; local businesses contribute materials as needed. The cost to the school is about $1 per student per course per year. Mutual respect and teamwork result.

Some suggestions from school personnel at Alton for other districts interested in such a program:

1. A versatile and cooperative staff is needed.
2. Community interest must be developed through many contacts with organizations and individuals. The press can help.
3. An evaluation system is needed so that parents are kept informed.
4. You must offer a wide variety of courses to interest all kids; some programs must be cultural, some very practical, a few new and different, some creative. Programs that don't work well must be replaced by others.

Alton uses a system of matching a volunteer with a staff member for back-up and believes this works very well.

One interesting outcome occurred when an enrichment program (French) was so successful that it was added to the regular curriculum.

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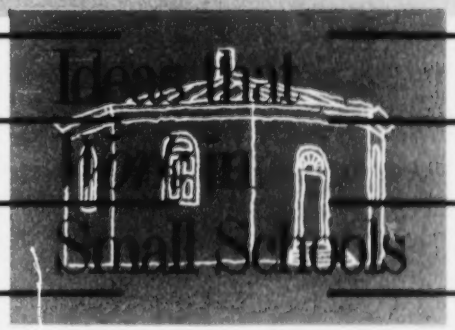
Alton loves to have visitors but prefers prior arrangements. Contact Mary Batchelder at (603) 875-7500, or write her at School Street, Alton, New Hampshire 03809. Principal Sherwood Fluery will also be glad to talk to you.

If you have time, check on their High School Mentor Program, too - but that another story.



Bartlett (NH) Has Community/School Partnership

In 1983-84, the school leadership in Josiah Bartlett Elementary School decided they needed and wanted more productive relationships with the community, especially business leaders. This seemed like quite an ambitious project for a 200 pupil K-8 district, but Principal Joseph Rivers and his Board felt it would be worth the effort.

They brought the new idea into better focus while attending a Community/School Coordinator Training Project in Manchester, NH in April, 1984. Participants included Plymouth State College, the New Hampshire Volunteer Program, and the Community Education Office of the New Hampshire State Department of Education.

The Bartlett people came home excited about trying the ideas they heard described and applied for a Mott Foundation seed money grant. Since Mott had funded the New Hampshire Community Education Center meeting, the foundation quickly gave approval for a grant of $1000 to get them started.

The Steering Committee decided the first need was for a Community/School Newsletter, so the Bartlett Express was founded in July 1984. They believe now this decision was the right one for their school because it has served as an effective bridge to help get things moving in the district. (The Committee asked that we not yet use the term "catalyst", preferring "bridge" at this stage of development.)

Perhaps the reader will say - but every school has a newsletter - and most do today - so how is this different? After reviewing all seven issues published to date and talking with the people involved, these differences are evident:

1. It appears to be about a 50/50 proposition, in which community news gets at least equal space and emphasis on every page.
2. Small, inoffensive local ads are sold to help pay for the publication.
3. Controversial community subjects are covered, although the publication serves solely as an informational device, avoiding advocacy.
4. The Coordinator does not see herself as a "school person" but as a community/school employee.

The result is that the newsletter truly is a link between and among all groups in Bartlett. Better understanding has resulted, as the community learns more about school achievement and the school becomes more aware of community needs.

Recent issues have covered zoning proposals, getting information to all residents in a cheap and effective means without advocating any position on the problem.

Since skiing is big business in Bartlett, ski news occupies much space. Instructional programs, equipment swaps and sales, weather predictions, formation of ski clubs - all must be of interest to many residents, young and old.

One big recent concern in the community has been the need for a full-time recreation director. It seems almost everyone is town has strong feelings about this and the Bartlett Express has been a means of informing everyone about developments. When we visited, it appeared that so much interest had developed that if the town board (Selectmen) didn't fund the position, the school board (Committee) very likely would; however, the cost was the sticking point and the issue is due to be resurrected again in 1987.

The Steering Committee includes one representative of the School Committee and one Selectman. These two agree that there is no jealousy now since the two groups are working together to help build a better community.

The Steering Committee feels they are in an early stage of developing the Community School Partnership Concept but believe they have made an impressive beginning. Visitors cannot help

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but agree. Obviously the Newsletter isn't the answer to all problems. In fact the group has just completed a new publication called "Welcome to Bartlett - a Resource Guide," intended to acquaint new residents with information about the area. In a community where 60-65% of the houses are second homes, it should help to tie these people quickly into the local scene.

When asked to counsel those interested in starting a similar project, Steering committee members offered the following advice:

1. Start small and don't expect wonders.
2. Involve people - all the people interested. That includes businesses, churches, kids, adults, etc.
3. Don't expect anyone to give too much, either time or money, but involve every person who is interested. If someone volunteers, you must find something quickly for that person to do.
4. Constantly push the idea of the school as the center of the community.
5. Use a small group Steering Committee which represents major interests, keep it small but representative.
6. Build liaison between school and town officials; this fosters teamwork.
7. Look at existing PTA (or whatever) as a resource for program development but realize it may not be a representative group (mostly young mothers) and thus not the best sponsor for a community-wide effort.
8. See the newsletter as a leavener. If it stirs interest in a project which someone else then pushes and takes credit for, don't worry about it. Community-school improvement is everyone's gain.
9. Don't be afraid to start - and to share credit.

Principal Joseph Rivers will be glad to have you contact him at (603) 374- 2331, or at Bartlett Elementary School, Bartlett, New Hampshire 03812. You may also wish to write to Coordinator Kathy Nealley, c/o the school. These people love to share, so don't be afraid to call or visit, but make an appointment.

Another valuable resource person is Mrs. Mary Craig, Director of the New Hampshire Education Center, who has much information about the Community/School Partnership concept and will be happy to share. She may be addressed at 49 Ashland, Manchester, NH 03104 or called at (603) 622-5711.

You will like New Hampshire people, who love to help others.

NUMBER FORTY

TPR To MFL - A Winning Combination At York

The staff at York Central School gives the credit for their success in foreign language instruction to Dr. James J. Asher, Professor of Psychology at California State at San Jose. If Dr. Asher were to visit Retsof, New York, where York is located, he would no doubt share our view that the local staff deserves the praise for making his plan fly.

Dr. Asher describes the basic idea of Total Physical Response (TPR) as "...pretuning the student with a high level of listening skill so that he will have a perceptual readiness to make a graceful, nonstressful transition to speaking the language." Only recently has this method, originally intended for U.S. Army language instruction, been introduced into public schools, principally as a method to teach English to Spanish-speaking children. York is showing the idea also works beautifully in reverse.

Bertha Segal is the best known author of TRP materials. York Spanish teacher Joanne Dickinson was fortunate to attend two Segal-instructed workshops but says she has had to build most of her own materials during the four years the school has been adapting the program to local needs.

Segal's approach to TRP is simple - pattern language instruction after the way the young child learns a first language. The developmental steps are:

1. Students listen and respond to commands by observing behavior modeled by instructor.
2. Instructor commands without modeling.
3. Instructor combines old and new commands and models.
4. Teacher recombines old and new commands without modeling.

Our visit to a TPR classroom quickly revealed the similarity with "mother's first language lessons" for babies. Just like "wave bye-bye", the simple commands are accompanied by appropriate modeling and hand signals. Of course, it takes longer with babies but appropriate responses come from both groups. It naturally follows that students will soon begin to respond to simple commands without the previously necessary models, followed by development of the self-confidence necessary to speak the language. Then in natural progression will follow the ability to write it.

The foreign language staff at York Central includes Mrs. Joanne Dickinson, Mrs. Adrianna Betts and Mrs. Eleanor Gaidasz. They have found it takes about 10 hours of listening lessons before most students are ready to begin expressing themselves. Then when students start to speak, they find it enjoyable, unlike the common feelings of self-consciousness and fear beginning language students often report. Segal puts it nicely: "We must not rush students into reading and writing before they have adequate experience with listening and, later, speaking."

Another technique much in evidence at York is the emphasis on "what's right", rather than "what's wrong". By focusing on small successes, students come to feel good about themselves and their foreign language abilities. Dr. Asher encourages this approach by reminding us that pre-school children without paid instructors easily comprehend and say thousands of sentences, but high school and college students with teachers find it extremely stressful to learn a few sentences in a second language.

Bertha Segal summarizes what we have long overlooked - the natural learning sequence in language development:

1. Listening skill pre-dates speaking.
2. Adults use gentle commands to facilitate children's learning.
3. Speech emerges naturally and need not be forced.

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Mrs. Dickinson at York emphasizes the need for a "silent period" in beginning language instruction, thus eliminating early anxiety. Many of us can recall the well-intentioned commands from family and friends who knew we were embarking on the study of a foreign language: "Say something to me in German!" after a class period or two. As Joanne Dickinson reminds us, "Expression is perfectly natural and will come when the student is ready."

Mrs. Dickinson was the only foriegn language teacher at York four years ago when it offered a typical rural school program of French and Spanish. Two years ago foreign languages were added for Grades 7 and 8 and in 1987 grade 5 joined the program. In 1988 the program will include Grades 5-12 and probably a fourth teacher will be needed.

Obviously this kind of teaching, like all quality instruction, requires much preparation. The York teachers say "more than normal." We saw Mrs. Dickinson lug into her Spanish I class two large bags loaded with all kinds of balls and sporting goods. Displays of pictures cut from magazines showing various facial shapes and hair styles were also put to good use in her command-based instruction.

By the fourth level, students interview native speakers who live in the school district. This brings new insights into expressions and body movement, so difficult to learn by Americans used to being told, "Don't talk with your hands."

The new Regents requirements make it somewhat difficult to determine how much enrollment in languages has been affected by any new method, but administrators at York verify that the enrollments were increasing before the Regents mandated more languages. It also appears that a higher percentage of students stick with the language selected than was previously true.

Results may not be simple to determine but it is easy to know a good program when you see it. Enthusiastic teachers, responsive students, supportive community - we suggest you call or write Joseph Scanlon, Principal, Retsof, NY 14539, (716) 243-0300 to arrange a visit. Joanne Dickinson will be happy to provide you with written information or to talk to you about the program. We strongly urge you to avoid any contact, however, if you are not ready to be sold! "Retsof" may be "Foster" spelled backwards, but there is nothing else backward about this forward-looking school and its emphasis on program development!

NUMBER FORTY TWO

Brocton New York, Encourages Individualized Instruction

All too often, the term Individualization of instruction is used to cover a wide range of applicators from grouping to tutoring. All too often, what we dream about doing as a teacher is shattered in the hard cold realization that there just isn't time to instruct in an individual mode. So, it is refreshing to encounter a teacher who has found a way to teach fifth grade mathematics in a truly individualized manner.

Patty Petrella began in 1980 in Brocton Central as a fifth grade teacher in a self-contained classroom. Having had some prior experience in a Florida system that stressed individualization, she saw an opportunity to capitalize on her experience when Brocton adopted the Scott, Foresman Mathematics series. That series has a rather complicated flow chart system which requires a detailed record kept for each student. The flow chart indicates pre- and post-test results on a series of objectives, with instructional feedback loops to ensure mastery of the objectives.

The upshot, as Patty quickly discovered, was that after the first week or two of school, group instruction was impossible; students were moving in different rates through the text. Furthermore, the daily assessment, planning and record keeping for each student took an enormous amount of teacher time outside class. She almost gave up.

But then, several things happened. She began to master the routine and could cut down all that extra time. Second, the response from her students was mind-boggling. Youngsters who started off the year hating math began telling her it was their favorite subject. Third, parental reaction was good because the daily homework invited parental participation.

The biggest advantage from Patty's perspective was that it allowed her to spend time each day with each student on a one-on-one basis. She could use the time to teach a new concept, or help a struggling student, or strengthen rapport with a student who needed it.

Because each student works independently and at an individual pace, a great deal of independence is generated. Students know exactly what they have to do for mastery of a concept. The teacher spends no time "lecturing" or making class assignments but focuses on working with individuals. The observer was stirred to think he was witnessing a truly individualized instructional program at work.

But there are some problems. Patty estimates a good half hour each day must be spent in teacher preparation. When you teach a self-contained classroom, that is a very large portion of preparation for one subject. Superintendent Richard H. Gloss supports her program but agrees that the district should do a longitudinal study to assess the impact of Mrs. Petrella's teaching on student performance in higher grades.

The bottom line seems to be that a dedicated teacher, willing to invest the time and effort, can realize the dream of individualized instruction. It may well be that the end result is not a super math student, but an independent thinking kid who knows how to tackle problems.

If you would like to know more, write or call Superintendent Richard H. Gloss, Brocton Central School, Brocton, NY 14716. (176) 792-9192.

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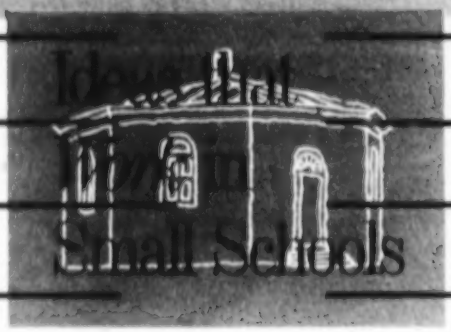

Orleans, Vermont Develops a School Improvement Process

Almost everyone would like to see a workable process for school improvement, even as far back as Socrates and as recently as the National Commission on Excellence in Education. Orleans Southwest District, with offices in Hardwick in rural northeastern Vermont, seems to have put together an eclectic approach which is working for them as they move to improve their schools.

Back in 1980, Superintendent Bruce Richardson and representatives of the district's five small elementary schools sat down to take a hard look at themselves. They concluded they needed to broaden their backgrounds but needed some outside help, someone who understood the special problems of small rural schools. The late Ron Edmonds of the Michigan State University of Vermont to conduct a week-long inservice training on the seven characteristics which mark an effective school. The Orleans Southwest District took advantage of the inservice to help validate its own course of improvement.

Edmonds' program had originally been developed for New York City, had later been adapted to fit the State of Connecticut, and obviously needed many changes before a small rural school system could use it. Bob Carlson and Bud Meyer of the University of Vermont's College of Education and Social Services helped with the adaptation process. There followed a period of a year in which a small core of believers – teachers and administrators who felt Edmonds' program could work – wrestled with its application to the Orleans Southwest District.

Essentially, the program, called The Effective School Assessment, idenifies seven characteristics:

> School environment, mission, leadership, expectation level, curriculum and instruction, monitoring progress, and home-school relations.

A school staff makes a self-assessment in each of these seven characteristics and determines the needs, opportunities and issues for each. From this flows an action plan which lays out steps, meetings, and procedures to improve the school and the district.

Obviously, this is an ambitious undertaking. Staff felt they needed a great deal of preparation before they could make the program work. Superintendent Richardson worked out arrangements with Dr. Kenneth Hood of the University of Vermont (called UVM) to provide graduate level course work within the District. UVM professors were able to focus courses on the precise areas where staff felt the need for their own improvement. UVM Summer Institutes provided even more focus on specific curricular ideas. Finally, Professors Carlson and Meyer were available to advise the staff as they implemented Action Plans based on the Effective Schools Assessment. UVM has provided invaluable out-reach services to the District, services which small rural schools throughout the nation could use.

As a result of the assessments, district-wide task forces and committees on various topics were set up. The K-12 Writing Curriculum Task Force is completing two years of work to develop a uniform writing program for all grades and at all schools. The Mastery Learning group studied the Johnson City (NY) Public Schools program and decided to try it themselves. Sharing their experiences has resulted in a growth form 12, then 30, and this year, 65 teachers using Mastery Learning techniques in their classrooms. Other task forces in reading, math, in-service, science and social studies have been developed by teachers to aid in their own improvement.

The District has learned how to pull together, using its own strengths, and to involve outside help effectively. It has concluded that a single

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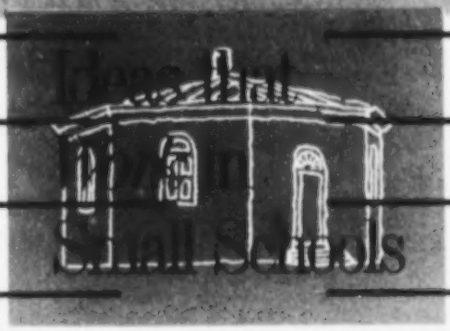
teacher working alone has little impact – the school or group of schools must be involved. It has discovered that improvement must be research-based and that adequate records must be maintained. Through this approach, self-help has reached an effective level; 75% of the present inservice leaders are from the public school staff.

Superintendent Richardson lists five solid results of the work:

1. Unified and coordinated curriculum in math, reading and writing
2. Mastery levels established
3. Increased staff development and self-expectation (one 5th Grade teacher wrote A Study of Vermont which was published and distributed by the State)
4. A symbiotic and satisfying relationship with the University of Vermont
5. Increased School Board awareness of the instructional program

If you are interested in a workable program of school improvement for rural schools, get in touch with Superintendent Burce Richardson, Orleans Southwest District, Hardwick, Vermont 05843. Telephone 802/472-5787. He will be happy to share what he terms a "slow process - but effective."



Barre, Vermont, Expands Individual Talents in Elementary School

Finding Barre Town Elementary School takes good directions and a little luck. It seems to be surrounded by snow fields and granite quarries but the search was rewarding. Although the building houses almost 1,000 pupils in K-8 plus special education, it has a gifted and talented program which could easily be transplanted to many smaller schools. Open to any student, the program strives to avoid labels and aims to help expand the learning of those children with special talents. It's called the Explore/Enrichment Program and it appears to be exceeding the expectations of its planners.

The Barre model (EEP) carefully avoids labeling anyone and is based on individual special talents rather than grouping all the gifted together as a class. The emphasis is on individual enrichment, not giftedness. Thus, a student may be only an average academic performer but possess special talents and interests in weather forecasting. That student has a chance to explore meteorology to enrich his education.

The program uses three criteria to identify students for admission: First, a demonstrated ability to organize their time and effort in the classroom. Second, an ability to complete classroom work with reasonable accuracy and promptness. Third, interest in pursuing a topic in depth.

Revell Allen, the Explore/Enrichment teacher, points out that student entry into the program is uncomplicated by IQ testing or screening committee work. If a teacher is satisfied that a student meets the three criteria, she simply fills out a short referral form. At this point, Revell and the teacher discuss the student's potential for the program; if they agree and if there is an opening, the student is accepted.

A decision is made whether the student is to work independently or in a small group of like-interested students. Revell Allen spends time helping the student identify a specific topic to explore, plan needed research, and locate school and community resources. As a mentor for the student or small group, she emphasizes thinking skills, research techniques, and problem solving. At the end of the project, (usually 8 to 10 weeks), each student must develop some kind of presentation for classmates and parents. Evaluations are made by the parents, the classroom teacher, the student and by Mrs. Allen. Big gains in self confidence, in responsibility, and in enthusiasm for school have been noted by parents and teachers.

Revell, as a resource person, works closely with classroom teachers and ties in to ongoing classroom projects. She maintains a file of active community resource people and places which can be fitted into her own enrichment projects, or into small groups or total class projects directed by classroom teachers. She also works closely with librarian and media specialists. Fortunately, her teaching space is part of the library area.

She must be doing something right. Now in its fourth year, there is a waiting list to get into the program right now. Next year, Superintendent Ray Proulx and Principal David James plan to expand by adding another enrichment teacher. An active parent organization has strongly supported EEP and has even provided supplementary funds for the program.

Because enrichment is emphasized, many of the pitfalls and stigma associated with the usual gifted and talented programs are avoided. Yet there are students in any school who have never really been challenged and to whom school

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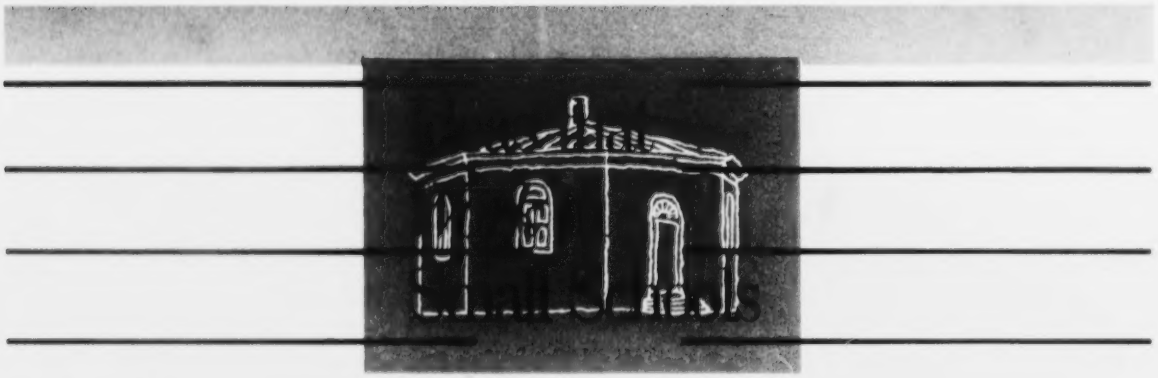
seems to sentence to boredom. Even a small rural school could begin a program like EEP on a modest basis and start enriching the education of its specially talented students. True, you would need a sparkplug like Revell Allen, but the idea is perhaps one whose time has come. Allen was a regular classroom teacher who was recruited for this job by the administration.

If you are interested in knowing more, write Principal David James, Barre Town Elementary School, R.D. 2, Barre, Vermont 05641, or call 802/476-6617. If you plan to visit, be sure you get exact directions! And, if it is February, take your cross country skis!



Richford, Vermont Modifies Mastery Learning

Every school has a personality and a style of its own. Thus, a successful program in one school may take time and revision to work in another. Richford Elementary School learned this fact three years ago when Franklin Northeast Assistant Superintendent Ray McNulty presented the concept of Mastery Learning to the Richford staff. Of the 13 teachers on staff, three initially indicated a strong desire to implement the Mastery Learning concept. The three - Mary Sherrer, 1st Grade; Kary Lavely, 2nd; and Carol Hickey, 3rd - formed the first team.

After two years of preparation, the team is beginning to make real headway with implementation this year. During those years, the team visited other schools to observe Mastery teaching, participated in summer workshops conducted by the University of Vermont, and spent long hours on their own, sharpening their skills and procedures. Principal Don Martin gave strong support to the team and the School Board welcomed the Mastery approach and offered modest financial assistance.

The team and Don Martin adopted the name "Outcomes-Based Instruction". To signify their own emphases and approaches to implementation. They have noted several objective indicators that their hard work is bearing fruit.

- number of children needing correctives is declining.
- Class averages on the Monday reading test have increased from mid-70% to 97%.
- parents have become active participants in the learning process. (Before school starts in the fall, Don Martin notes, parents now approach him with requests that their children be placed in one of the Outcome-based classes).
- the wide range of performances noted in September is narrowing.
- more sounds have been mastered by more students this year than ever before.
- a much higher mastery level this year than last.

Subjectively, the team reports much student improvement in enthusiasm, neater work, increased attentiveness, and best of all, in parental response to teacher requests to help children in the home. Overall, there has been a heightened motivation for learning on the part of students.

Philosophically, the commitment of the team is rooted in the concept that while aptitude determines rate of learning, all children can learn, given enough time and effective teaching. (Jerome Bruner, are you listening?)

Several tips the team would like to share with any school considering this type program include:

1. The team needs time to plan together almost daily.
2. Paraprofessionals or volunteer parents (preferably both) are essential.
3. Substitute teachers need to be trained in the techniques so they can cover adequately.
4. Don't try it unless you are ready for hard work.
5. You must have strong administrative and Board support.
6. Summer employment of teachers to prepare, up date, or otherwise revise unit guides is strongly advised.

The paraprofessionals are being trained by the Community College of Vermont. Part of that training deals directly with the project. The University of Vermont now offers special courses

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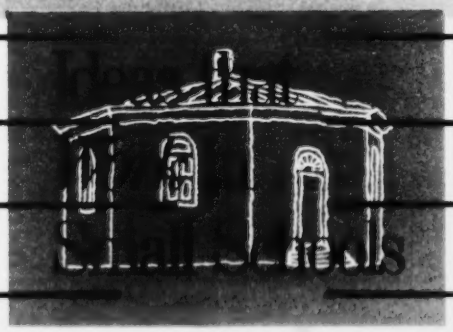
in Mastery Learning. In fact, one of the more unusual aspects of education in Vermont is the Network, a group of regional schools working with the University of Vermont to develop in-service and curriculum leadership projects. RSP plans to take a more detailed look at the Vermont Network in a future report in this series.

The team feels a bit like the old prophets – "without honor in one's own country" – because while they have been invited to give demonstrations of their techniques to several other school staffs in the state, they have not been as quick to convince their own school colleagues to switch to outcome-based instruction as hoped. However, Don Martin reports that recently the staff requested an in-service presentation on outcomes-based instruction. This request was granted using the team as presenters. After the in-service agreed that the instructional process was worth trying. Given the awesome energy of the team and the unquestionably better results they are getting with students. 1985-86 will likely see the formation of other dedicated teams at Richford Elementary School.

Mary Sherrer shares one first grade story for our members. One first grader reported they had Sexual Liberty in a Mastery Learning Unit! Some probing brought out that "Sexual Liberty" stands in New York harbor to welcome immigrants to our land!

Should you have further interest, please call Principal Don Martin at 802/848-7453 or write him at Richford Elementary School, RFD #1, Richford, Vermont 05476. If you are planning a visit and can't find Richford, look 'way up there on the Canadian border.



Addison, Vermont Finds Unusual Way to Bring Counseling to Kids

If you are where Superintendent Keith Hall was four years ago, you have problems. His district was faced with a burgeoning number of societal problems–child abuse, drug and alcohol abuse, disturbed children, student violence–all impinging on the school with such force that learning was imperiled and teachers discouraged. The picture was further clouded by a School Board reluctant to spend money on an elementary guidance program in a rather poor rural county.

Fortunately for all, there were two factors which helped initiate changes for the better. First, Lincoln Elementary Principal Phoebe Engel used the assistance of the Counseling Service of Addison County to make a survey of the school district. The results of the survey demonstrated beyond doubt that the magnitude of the problems and their impact on schools were larger than anyone had guessed. The survey also indicated that some kind of help was an absolute must for elementary children.

The second factor was the presence of the Counseling Service. A private, non-profit and independent center, with some modest state funding, it provides a wide range of youth and family services. A competent staff of counselors, psychologists, therapists, and a psychiatrist was on hand and ready to work with children at risk. Naomi Tannen, Youth and Family Services Coordinator, has a special education background and a proven ability to work with teachers and administrators.

The project started small three years ago. Keith Hall and Phoebe Engel began the program as a pilot in her elementary school with one Counseling Service counselor, Mark Mumford. Cost for the program was under $4,000 for one day per week, the key being that all the other services of the Counseling Service are available for those cases Mark could not handle alone. These back-up services are included in the contract without any additional charge.

After the initial pilot project Wes McKee, an outstanding teacher-turned-counselor, was hired to serve the whole five town district. He works from the premise that self-esteem is basic to a child's learning. He handles individual or small group counseling to help kids deal with losses through death or separation, with drug and alcohol abusing adults in their lives, with the stresses of living as "latch-key" children. His self-referral box supplements teacher or administrator referrals and allows a child to cry for help with a problem not otherwise detected. "Shrink" was his first title, but as Wes began building the trust of kids, parents, and teachers, that was replaced with "Wes" or "Mr. McKee." His frequent visits to School Committee meetings to discuss the program also have helped in its acceptance.

The program has grown. Wes works almost as much with parents and teachers as he does with kids and ties in his work with the school administration and his own supervisor. One of the most promising developments has teen teacher in-service offerings by the Counseling Service to help teachers build programs for alcohol abuse awareness and the prevention of sexual abuse. Naomi Tanner reports a staff growth from 4 to 21 in less than five years, including sex counselors who now work in the public schools. The school principal is involved in the hiring of the counselor to be assigned to his/her school so a good fit can be obtained.

Superintendent Hall reports strong School Board support for the program. Costs are reasonable, the program is meeting the pressing needs of kids, and the public has been overwhelmingly supportive at hearings where the program was discussed.

If a school is going to prospose such a program, Naomi Tannen suggests it is vital to

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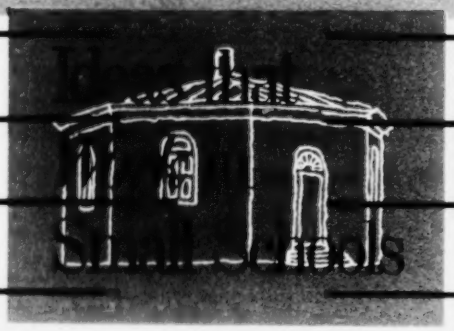
give much thought to how to begin. Addison held a public hearing on the idea, for example, so that people could react before anything was formally proposed. There was much open discussion of the need and no one "took credit" for the idea. Thus, sort of an informal concensus was reached before it was included in the budget. There was opposition, but far more people supported the proposal.

Wes McKee cautions that "it takes years to build real trust." Thus it is essential that the person used in this role is the type people will trust and is someone likely to stay on the job for some years.

It is a prime example of how a small rural school system can provide services for its students, services which are often denied because decision makers can't see the need or the program will be too controversial for leaders to touch. If you want to talk to a real "Kids First" person and learn more about this excellent program, call Superintendent Keith Hall at 802/453-3657 or write him at Addison Northeast Supervisory Union District, Bristol, Vermont 05443. Naomi Tannen also would welcome questions or visits; she can be reached at 802/388-6751.



Brookfield, Vermont, Belts Its Language Problems

A small (123 students K-6) rural school on a windswept Vermont ridge, Brookfield Elementary feels like a large home. There are window boxes, a gaily decorated library, friendly children, and a group of professionals and aides who really care about kids.

Three years ago the entire staff attended a week-long workshop on language skills, a workshop which opened eyes and sensitized teachers to the language deficiencies among their students. Some students were being pulled out for speech correction, but lots of others weren't getting any special help. The teachers became concerned about the generally low level of conversational skills among fairly large numbers of their children. A study of standardized achievement test results revealed that reading and language were consistently weak and math strong for Grades 1, 2, and 3. They realized that as teachers, they needed to become more proficient at identifying specific language needs, at planning curriculum to meet those needs, and at measuring progress at all levels.

Sparked by a substitute teacher, Betsy Darby Hale, and strongly supported by Principal Clayton Gage, the staff began to develop their plan. Everyone uses the word BELT (Brookfield Elementary Language Training Project) to describe the resulting program, one which is deceptively simple.

All students, K-3, are grouped in six ability groups of about ten each. One gifted, three average, one midly remedial, and one severely language deficient comprise the make-up of the groups. These groups, each with a teacher, meet for 30 minutes on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday to work on language activities at their own skill level. This is called "Little BELT." "Big BELT "occurs each Wednesday, when the groups are mixed for cross fertilization of new skills and learnings. Each week all groups work on a uniform content theme and a language theme so that Big BELT can be a cooperative activity.

Throughout there is steady attention to language skills – using complete sentences, speaking clearly, using correct pronunciation, and striving for proper grammer. Teachers aren't the only ones who correct deficient language skills. Many parents report children correcting parents' language, and on one occasion even a visiting State Police Troop Commander was BELTed by a brave student. (The student was polite and the Commander took the correction graciously!)

A related effort by the staff was to obtain a modest grant of $600 to provide further in-service training for the teaching staff. The in-service work focused on the specific area of language development and on language as a teachable continuum of skills. A week in August, 1984 and three follow-up sessions will complete the workshop, with a report planned for the School Board in May, 1985.

There is little doubt about the dedication of this team of teachers and aides. About 50% of the materials are teacher-made, each teacher shares in the development of the planning, and they use Wednesday lunch time for an animated planning session. Principal Gage and Superintendent Roger Bourassa both strongly support the program and look at it as a preventive program to overcome the deficit language skills so often the cause of many academic problems. The School Board has been very supportive from the beginning. When asked whether they had full administrative

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support for their efforts, one teacher quickly responded, "Oh, we don't need their support - they're here working right beside us!" Obviously it isn't money which has made this project go - it is people!

You can learn more about this grass roots approach by contacting Principal Clayton Gage, 802/276-3153. If you wish to know how "exportable" this program is, write David Joslyn, Resource Librarian, Vermont Educational Resource Center, State Office Building, Montpelier, Vermont, 05602.

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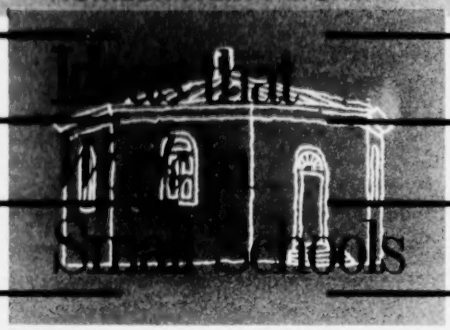

Livonia's ABC Plan Rates AOK

Livonia's ABC Plan has brought the school considerable publicity and recognition. All the staff members interviewed mentioned their pride in the program and several said the school system has gained much "prestige" from such recognition. However, Middle School Principal John Williams and Elementary School Principal David DeLoria are quick to point out that their "success" should be focused on the changes in the students, not resulting prestige. All, however, are proud of having received the U.S. Office of Education's Merit Certificate in May 1987.

Five years ago educators in Livonia were frustrated with the many negative consequences of pull-out remedial programs. Disruptive scheduling, lack of coordination between classroom and remedial programs, lost instructional time, and students' poor self-concept that sometimes comes with their participation in remedial programs, were but a few of the drawbacks associated with pull-out remedial programs. Despite the problems, all schools were involved in such programs simply because remediation was needed and required, and there seemed to be no reasonable alternative.

The ABC Plan originates from a task force put together by Superintendent of Schools James Franklin during the '80-'81 school year. The task force was assigned the challenge of assessing learning problems within the school district and recommending improved instructional delivery systems to deal with those problems. Superintendent Franklin chose Ted Universal, the school's reading coordinator to chair the task force.

The plan was originally designed to meet the highly diverse needs of students in grades 1-6 with various remediation problems. The basic plan is simple; all instruction, including remedial, is planned and delivered within the regular classroom.

To accomplish this, modification had to be made in classroom, professional staff organization, and assignment. A new term, "cluster" replaced the "classroom" as the necessary unit of organization.

A cluster is composed of about 50 children, (two regular size classrooms) and three teachers, one of whom is a certified reading or special education teacher. Priority in assignment goes to those students with remediation needs in all three basic skill areas (math, reading, and writing), followed by those with two needs. Assignments are kept near this ratio: 35% remedial, 40% average, and 25% above-average, thus assuring that no cluster can be called a "dumping ground."

Each of the three teachers in a cluster teaches one remedial basic skill area, plus the developmental program for that same skill area. Under this configuration, the coordination of remedial and developmental instruction is guaranteed. The school staff notes, "This, in itself, has far-reaching positive impact on the total educational program."

Cluster teachers have equal authority in classroom management. They combine efforts in delivering content area study and in deciding among themselves who is responsible for these respective areas. Second grade cluster teachers, Jan McGrath, Mary Lou Bondi, and Karen Bennett assured us that no one had more authority in cluster management than another and that sharing information about students and their needs is a vital factor in the success of the program. Since each team is responsible for planning its own schedule, no two cluster schedules are alike. Teachers are free to build their schedule based on student interests and needs, within certain time limits, of course.

Ted Universal, project coordinator, notes that the two-way in-service aspect of the program is yet another strength. The specially trained reading or special education teachers share their understanding of diagnosis and

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remediation with classroom teachers; in return classroom teachers help the reading or special education teachers with content area expertise and classroom management. Discussion with the teachers in other cluster teams supported both the belief that this method helps students and the value teachers place on the effectiveness of teamwork. Dave Leyden, grade 6 Special Education teacher, told us that his team has been together for five years and how much they value the team's support. He used the term "following" to describe how he learns from watching other cluster teammates working with "his" kids.

Mr. Universal notes that, "this is not a solution to everyone's problems regarding pull-out remedial programs, but is an organizational plan that has certainly helped us better meet children's remedial needs without sacrificing the regular curriculum in the process." In his words, it is "a functional organizational plan which facilitates learning." The plan is constantly under review and revised to meet new circumstances. An example of a plan change involved one cluster in the middle school having three teachers in three rooms, while other clusters have altered classroom space slightly to meet their unique situations. Creativity is emphasized everywhere. As Dave Leyden remarked, "We're all on our toes -- always; we just pick-up on each other and suggest improvements." He also notes how easy it is to integrate substitute teachers into the cluster team.

Each grade level has several self-contained classrooms, in addition to the ABC Plan clusters. All students with multiple remedial needs however, are generally placed in a cluster. The assignment process is very sophisticated and includes a detailed Pupil Profile Form. The Building Resource Team, much individual teacher input, as well as parent recommendations are all vital to the program's success.

Everyone we talked to said, "it works." New York State PEP Test results at grade 6 level, have shown dramatic improvement, the faculty has almost no turnover, and parents are very supportive of the program. Several teachers said simply, "We'd never go back" to the former days of pull-out remedial programs.

Would you like to know more? Well, many people do and several other schools have already decided to implement the ABC Plan. If you would like more information on this innovative approach to remediation, contact Superintendent James Franklin at (716) 346-2323. You may also write him at Livonia Central School, P.O. Box E, Livonia, NY 14487. Livonia is located approximately 35 miles south of Rochester, a mere 17 miles south of the N.Y.S. Thruway. Write or call anytime, but do not just drop in, as they try to organize visits to avoid unnecessarily upsetting the instructional program. A single page overview description, as well as a 16 page detailed narrative are available upon request. If you decide to visit, plan to spend the day. Everyone is enthusiastic about this fine program and very open to questions. This program is worth the time and energy to investigate further.